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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 PRISTINA 000630

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [ETTC](#) [UNMIK](#) [YI](#)
SUBJECT: KOSOVO: PM CEKU VISITS THE NORTH

REF: PRISTINA 587

Classified By: COM TINA S. KAIDANOW FOR REASONS 1.4 (B) AND (D).

¶1. (C) SUMMARY: During a July 22 visit to majority ethnic Serb municipalities in northern Kosovo, Prime Minister Agim Ceku declared that northern Mitrovica "is and will always be a part of Kosovo." He also requested that KFOR and UNMIK "insulate this region politically and practically from Serbia." Ceku informed both KFOR and UNMIK CIVPOL of his proposed travel to Bosniak and Albanian enclaves in majority ethnic Serb northern Kosovo as well as a Serbian Orthodox monastery, but declined their offers to provide security for the visit. Ceku did bring Pristina-based media with him. While we have encouraged Ceku to undertake outreach to the Serb community, we are nonetheless concerned that his message there may increase tensions in the aftermath of the declarations of three northern Serb municipalities cutting off ties with Pristina (reftel). Thus far, his visit and comment appear to have gotten relatively limited press play. END SUMMARY.

¶2. (SBU) Local media reported that on July 22 Prime Minister Agim Ceku visited northern Kosovo. They quoted Ceku as requesting that KFOR and UNMIK "insulate the majority ethnic Serb north -- both politically and practically -- from Serbia." He also asked that measures be put in place there "the same as at any Kosovar border, to know who was entering and exiting Kosovo" because some "have, up to now, thought that the border was at the Ibar River." (NOTE: This latter statement is a reference to Leposavic deputy mayor Nebojsa Radulovic, who one week earlier had allegedly punched an ethnic Albanian border police officer at Kosovo's northernmost crossing point along the Administrative Boundary Line with Serbia. UNMIK is considering legal action against Radulovic. END NOTE).

¶3. (C) Ceku told COM and Special Representative Ambassador Frank Wisner July 27 that although he informed KFOR and UNMIK CIVPOL of his travel plans, he did not accept their offers of a security detail to accompany him. Arben Qirezi, Ceku's main political advisor, confirmed to PolOff July 25 that the prime minister's press office arranged for print and television media to accompany him up north.

14. (SBU) During his visit to the "Bosnia mahalla" neighborhood in northern Mitrovica and the ethnic Albanian villages of Kelmend and Zhazh in Zvecan municipality, Ceku encouraged the inhabitants to move freely throughout the north, thanked them for their determination to stay on in their homes, and said that northern Mitrovica "is and will always remain part of Kosovo." While in Zvecan, Ceku also visited a stone fortress that serves as a museum to Isa Bolitini, a Kosovo Albanian who fought against Ottoman rule in the early 1900's and the Serbian Orthodox monastery of Sokolica, where he stressed the Kosovo government's commitment to protecting Kosovo's cultural heritage. He explained to the press that he did not visit the historically ethnic Albanian "three towers" area in northern Mitrovica so as "not to provoke the Serb population" that now lives there. He also visited the Kosovo Protection Corps facility in ethnic Albanian southern Mitrovica.

15. (C) COMMENT: While we have encouraged Ceku's outreach to Serb communities, including in the North, his message there was potentially provocative. Ceku admitted to COM and Ambassador Wisner July 27 that he "probably should not have made the visit," but said he needed to dampen criticism that he and his government were not responding to recent events and statements by Serb municipal officials there. Fortunately, press play has been limited and Kosovo Serbs have not commented on Ceku's visit, but Ambassador Wisner underscored to Ceku the need to avoid provocative acts of any kind and to let the Contact Group carry the Kosovo government's water in the North. END COMMENT.

16. (U) U.S. Office Pristina clears this cable for release in its entirety to U.N. Special Envoy for Kosovo Martti

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